

History of Mary Jane Little [Johnson]

Written by her daughter, Abby Johnson Kendrick [Robinson Gooch]

My mother Mary Jane Little was the daughter of Patriarch James A. Little and Hannah Matilda Baldwin. Her father was born in the state of New York and her mother in Birmingham, England. At the age of 16 her mother came to Utah with the 1st Handcart Company to cross the plains. She walked and pushed her handcart all the way. My mother was born 31 December 1859 in Salt Lake City, Utah. My mother's father had three wives, my grandmother being the 2nd wife. In the early days of the church the plural wives usually had to support themselves and their families and was considered more or less as Hagar of old, the 1st wife being the queen. The husband's word was supposed to be law and must be obeyed. Many times I have heard my grandmother and my mother tell of the hardships and heartaches they endured along with the many others. If they were asked why they endured those things, we were always told it was for the sake of the gospel.

My mother was the eldest of nine children. I cannot give much about my mother's childhood nor her schooling. I do remember her saying that she could never remember of sleeping warm, for the lack of sufficient bedding and fuel. Often she had not had all she had wanted to eat. Not through neglect of her mother, for she was ambitious and thrifty. Her mother was compelled to work for a living and oftentimes while my mother was yet very young she had to stay out of school to care for her younger brothers and sisters. Husbands were called on missions in the early days regardless of their financial circumstances so it was necessary that the wives take care of themselves.

Mother was two years old when they pioneered to St. George, Utah,. It was while there, when she was ten years old that her mother's 4th child was born and mother was taken out of school to care for the little family until her mother was able to do it. She did the washing, ironing, cooking and baked the bread and all the other things that go with keeping house. She said she did the mending for the family, too. She never had many childhood pleasures as most of her spare time was spent in threading the shuttle for the loom while her mother did the weaving. As we all know they spun their own cloth and made all their clothes as well as everything else.

When she was eleven years old they moved to Eagle Valley, Nevada. They were there just one year. The hardships they went through were terrible and then her mother took her little family and moved to Payson Utah to live with her mothers. They lived there just one year and my mother often said that that was one of the happiest years of her childhood days.

Her grandmother Cutler was a midwife, very ambitious and had fairly plenty. For once my mother said she slept warm and had a few things to eat that they were not used to. Her mother still worked but not so much. The things she was taught while there stayed with her all her life. She had access to good books and she loved to

read. Her mother taught her not to read trashy books and good books were hard to get. Although she was only twelve years old she made good use of her time.

Her grandmother was a brilliant woman and had a wealth of experience. She wasn't home much, being a midwife, and was called out all hours of the day and night. Mother said many mornings when she got up she would open her grandmother's door to see if she was home and she would find her kneeling by her bed in prayer. These things impressed on her young mind and she never forgot them.

A year later they moved to Kanab, Utah. Mother had a beautiful voice and when she was about thirteen years old a Mr. Thompson, a music teacher from Salt Lake City, heard her sing and sent to her mother and offered to put mother through music if she would let him take her to Salt Lake City with him. Of course, her mother couldn't spare her and she didn't get to go.

When she was about fifteen years old she met Elmer Wood Johnson, my father. I asked father once how come he noticed a little fifteen-year-old girl. He said her innocent sweet face and sweet voice and pretty curls attracted him. I quote father's own words of how he met her:

"I was in school and sat at a table with my back to the door. I heard the door open and someone came in. I turned and saw Lucy Brown [a cousin of Janey's and later my sister-in-law]. She walked over to the teacher. She had not closed the door and I glanced towards it and saw a young girl standing there. Her head was encircled by long black curls and she wore a grey woolen dress, homemade, and trimmed with blue braid. She looked so pleasant and beautiful that I gazed at her for a few seconds and then said to myself, 'She'll make a fine wife for some man.'"

He then told me of mother's first impression of him. (Quote) "A government exploring party in charge of Major Powell, coming down the Colorado River through Utah and Arizona and being composed of non-members from the east, happened to stop at Kanab for supplies. We had a dance and some of the party was there. Janey happened to be sitting by my sister, Ettie, watching us dance. All at once she said, 'Doesn't that little gentile over there think he's smart?' 'Which one?' asked Ettie and she pointed me out. Ettie said, 'He's not a gentile, he's my brother.' She was somewhat surprised and embarrassed at that. Rather a different opinion than mine of her." (Unquote)

In the fall of 1875 just one month before mother's sixteenth birthday, they were married in the Salt Lake Endowment House. Father was almost 21. In those days girl's dresses were lengthened by degrees rather than by age and she said some of the good people of Kanab were shocked to think she was getting married and hadn't even worn a long dress. They left Kanab by team and wagon on November 5th and father's sister-in-law went along as chaperone. They camped at night and cooked over a campfire. They were about two and a half weeks getting there and it was on this trip that mother saw a train and steam engine.

They were married 22 November 1875 and at this time the Salt Lake Temple was up just to the top of the basement windows. When she was asked if she was thrilled at being married she said she remembered being a homesick little girl. While in Salt

Lake she attended her first theatre. The play was called "Ireland As It Is". They arrived back home on December 22 having a trip she never forgot. They soon moved to Johnson, a little town 15 miles southeast of Kanab.

On the 6th of October 1876 the old stork left a sweet little girl to brighten their home. They called her Heva. Mother made all the little clothes by hand and by herself. She had nothing but straight pins to use on the baby. In those days men were advised by the authorities to marry plural wives. So in the fall of 1879 on November 22nd, father married Julia Ann Orton. Father was 25 and mother 21. What a test. Mother hadn't forgotten what her own family had gone through. Although she believed the principle to be true she felt like she couldn't live it. Shortly after the 2nd marriage on January 8, 1880, another little girl was born and they named her Lucy Ann and called her Lulu.

Not long after this father was called to serve a mission. Such faith they had. Before he left he killed a beef but it was so skinny they could hardly fry it. Vegetables were so scarce they would boil alfalfa for greens. They said they were better than nothing. He also bought them both material for a dress, cotton, and left them with 25 cents in the house and both of them living in the same house. I have heard them both say they could have gotten along worse, perhaps better, they didn't say. No doubt better than if father had been there with them.

Father had been gone 18 months when he took chills and fever and as they couldn't seem to get them stopped he was given an honorable release and sent home. When his wives sent to meet him they wore dresses alike with white leghorn hats with black ribbon bands and streamers to their waists, black shoes and white stockings. I forgot about their dresses but no doubt they were either black or white.

Father was surprised to find all their debts paid off and more in the house than when he left. Surely God was mindful of them. When their babies came along about a year later there was just one month's difference in them. They lived in the same house and planned and made their baby clothes alike. How is that? The next babies to be born were just 3 weeks apart. Mother's 4th child was a boy and Aunt Julia's (as we always called her) was a girl. However by this time they were not living in the same house, for father, along with others was being sought by U.S. officers for having more than one wife. Father along with some of the others served time in jail. They lived in caves or any other place they could to keep away from the officers. They felt the principle to be true but what a way to live.

Finally, President Wilford Woodruff advised men who wanted to live with their wives to take them and go to Old Mexico. The ones who did not want to go were to give up their plural wives. So in the fall of 1887 plans were made for father and mother to go to Mexico. Aunt Julia was expecting the stork again and was not able to go. Mother was expecting three months later so father left Aunt Julia with his mother. Father, mother, and the four children left in a covered wagon in September of 1887 for Old Mexico. Bedsprings were put in the wagon box and a bed made for mother and the two younger children. Father and the two older children slept under the stars except when it rained or stormed and then the wagon served them all. For

two months they traveled, cooking over a campfire and going through all the other hardships that all the pioneers went through. On the trip mother knit socks for father and stockings for her and the children and made by hand all the little clothes for the expected babe.

They arrived in Colonial Diaz, Old Mexico the latter part of November in 1887. Other families had pioneered the year before so they were not alone. They pitched their tents and prepared for the winter. How they got along I am sure I couldn't say but I do know that on January 22, 1888, the old stork left me at that humble tent and I begged them to keep me, so they did. Father told me many times how the heavens wept at my arrival. Mother and I were the victims of it for it rained constantly for almost two weeks. The tent leaked and father had to put pans on mother's bed to keep us dry.

It is needless to say that they had hard times for how could it have been otherwise. They had nothing in a material way but they did have their testimony of the gospel and good old pioneer blood in their veins. This gave them the courage to dare to do and they did it. Everyone had to work and help. Father made adobes and built two rooms and furnished them with the simplest kind of furniture, all homemade. Mother had learned through her efforts, enough about music so she taught a class of young people. No organ or piano but with a tuning fork she would get the right pitch. She could read music and she had a good understanding of the time. She also went out dressmaking taking one of the older girls to care for the baby.

In the fall of 1889 father went to Kanab and moved Aunt Julia and her little girls to Diaz. He had also built her a small home and she, too, had to find some way to support her family. Mother and Aunt Julia were so different but both were ambitious and good housekeepers and both were good seamstresses. Father had always lived on a ranch and he got him some stock but that wasn't enough to take care of one family let alone two families. Mother soon realized that she would have to get into some kind of business so she and her two oldest daughters, Heva and Lulu, decided a candy business would be good.

Mother paid \$100.00 for a pure sugar candy recipe and a roller for a small hand machine. Father built another room on the back of their home and it had a mud roof and floor. Perhaps you are wondering how a dirt floor could be kept clean. When the mud was put in it was smoothed and then left to harden and that way it stayed hard. We kept it clean, mopping it often. I well remember how many times I mopped it.

Mother and the girls went to work and they worked hard and under great difficulties, but they won. Soon the business grew until father had to build a little shop for the business. It was built away from the home, which made it better. The business grew and was the means for their livelihood. During the years they were building their business up mother made and sold cookies, bluing, and live yeast that she continued to sell always. She supplied the little town with her yeast. People would bring their flour in exchange for the yeast and in this way she supplied her family and Aunt Julia's family with all the flour they needed for years.

Mother had nine children; six girls and three boys. Her youngest boy died at the age of one year. Aunt Julia had six girls and they had a long hard struggle as we all know.

This is the story of my mother's life so I shall bring out the things that made her wonderful to me. In her busy and strenuous life she was never too busy to teach her children the beautiful things of life. She taught us to pray always. She taught us to sing and to always be kind and lenient with others. Never to run one's character down and to always remember to acknowledge God's will in everything. She taught us the value of going to church and instilled in our hearts a desire to be married in the temple. She taught us that honesty is the best policy and to be truthful regardless of the consequences. She taught us to keep the Word of Wisdom and to always pay a full tithe. Many a time I have helped to count sack after sack of green corn so we would be sure to pay a full tithe on it. The same with fruits and vegetables. I remember at one time she always gave her Sunday eggs to the Relief Society. We youngsters always like to gather the eggs on Sunday because it amused us to find that nearly always there were more eggs on Sunday.

The value of such teachings can never be overestimated. The Sabbath Day was always a day of worship in our home. When we were small I recall getting up on Sunday morning and there were all our little shoes polished and ready for Sunday School. The soot from the stove served as the polish. The buttons were all sewed on our little clothes ready to put on and I would like to say here that I can never remember putting on a pair of underclothes that didn't have tatting or lace on, all made by my mother's hands. How she found time to do it I can't say. There were no modern conveniences as we have today and everything was done the hard way but it was done and had to be kept neat and clean. We must remember that they had nothing but what their experiences as children of pioneers had left them. They had an enduring love of the Gospel and faith in God and a desire to give their children the things they had been deprived of and to instill in the hearts of their children a sincere love for the Gospel and its principles.

Everything was high and duty had to be paid on everything before coming over the line. When I was ten years old I went to El Paso, Texas with mother to do some shopping. That was my mother's first ride on a train as well as mine. One thing I am thankful for is that mother never allowed us to speak disrespectful of Aunt Julia, regardless of the conflicts that were bound to arise. That is wonderful to me. Mother's work deprived her of the privilege of attending Relief Society meetings, but she always gave 25 cents a month for her donation. Mother first joined the choir when she was twelve years old and she always sang in the choir. Father also had a good voice and we all belonged to the choir. We had many happy times in spite of the hardships.

We had lived in that little colony for 23 years when the revolution broke out. Most of the children had married and had their own homes so you can imagine what it was like for everyone to be compelled to leave their homes and all their possessions that they had worked so hard to get. But such was the fate of those brave pioneers and their families. On July 12, 1912, after two years of worry and trouble with the

natives we were given a few hours notice to get out. This is my mother's story so I will relate the departure from her home.

On this beautiful Sunday morning at 6 A.M., a runner came from Juarez, a little colony 75 miles from Diaz, and brought word from our Stake President that the rebels were coming that way and we must leave immediately. Well, the cattle, chickens, pigs, and all were turned loose. The grain in their bins was ready to be ground into flour and the fruit trees were loaded with fruit; the gardens were just in their glory, but everything was left behind. They really expected to return in a few days so they sorted out their nice linens and packed them in dresser drawers and took their common ones to knock about with. They took their clothes and bedding and piled them in their covered wagons and by noon 80 wagons left that little colony of Diaz. I will say here that they were never allowed to return and their homes were burned and their beautiful fruit and shade trees died and desolation followed in that little town of Diaz.

When this train of wagons reached the U.S. border their minds were relieved but their hearts were filled with fear. They were encouraged to keep their chins up and that all would be well. The U.S. government furnished them with tents and with rationed food. What a test! Hundreds of independent souls thrown to the mercy of strangers. Within two weeks of their arrival 17 babies were born into the world. It was hard on everyone but especially the older ones. They stayed there a month or so and then seeing that they were never going to be able to go back they made arrangements with Uncle Sam and free transportation was given them to any place they wanted to settle. As our older sister lived in Idaho on a dry farm, just out of Idaho Falls, father, mother, one sister and her husband, and my youngest brother, Lorin, and my sister, Nita, myself and husband all came to Idaho and filed on dry farms.

As we all know, children's misfortunes are their parent's, also. Two years previous to being driven out of Mexico, my sister Lulu's husband was accidentally killed leaving her with five small children and a sixth born just six days later. It was hard on mother but she said that God knows best and we must endure. Then one month after we had filed on our dry farms, my husband was accidentally killed leaving me with two small children and another expected in January. I had no insurance, home, or anything. O such misfortune; but mother still vowed that God knows best, but it was hard on them. O how brave she was! It seemed to us that her faith would falter, but it seemed that each trial made her stronger. They pioneered again starting all over with nothing. No modern conveniences; they even had to haul their drinking water. They moved to the valley in the winter and to the dry farm in the summer. The crops were uncertain and lots of hard work and worry with scarcely enough to live on. Then came another blow.

Mother had her two boys ten years apart. They idolized each other and mother idolized both of them. A telegram was received. Elmer, my eldest brother, who had a wife and two children, had suffered a stroke. It took his strength and his speech. It was a terrible blow and we couldn't understand it. He had always kept the Word of Wisdom and lived such a good clean life.

Mother's faith never faltered. As soon as he was able to travel, he and his family were sent for and he came to live near and share with the rest of us. We girls wondered when her trials and heartaches would end; little dreaming what she could and would stand. In the fall of 1919, my youngest brother, Lorin, now was 24 years old. He had never had a chance for higher education so he decided to sell his dry farm and go back east and study music. My parents felt he shouldn't devote all his young life to a dry farm so they advised him to go. He moved them to the valley for the winter and took out an insurance policy on his life for them and left. As Nita was still single she got a job to take care of the folks. Lorin had gotten a recommend from the bishop before he left so he could do some missionary work while he was studying music. He left for New York in December. About the 1st of February the folks received a telegram from the President of the Mission telling them that Lorin had contracted the flu and within three days had passed away.

Needless to say how we all felt and we really feared for mother and all prayed that she would have the strength to bear up. She was prostrate with grief while we waited the ten days for the body to arrive. They sent a missionary with it and he was laid to rest on the 10th of February 1920. On returning home from the services mother said, "Well, he always wanted to go on a mission and now he can preach the gospel all he wants to." That was the faith and trust she still had shining from her eyes.

My oldest brother Elmer, who had been suffering from his stroke for five years had come and been with the folks constantly. Although he could say but a very few words he had been a great comfort to them. He tried hard not to show his grief for their sakes, but it was too much for him as two days later he awoke very ill. A doctor was called but of no use as he passed quietly away holding mother's hand.

What she went through for the next few years cannot be written. It was a great battle for her but she won. As soon as they could arrange their affairs they sold their farm and moved to Salt Lake City where they could spend their remaining years working in the temple. However, mother's health was never good again so she went to the temple when she could but her heart and high blood pressure was more than she could battle. Father spent his time caring for her and going to the temple when he could.

At every opportunity she had she testified that God lives and that he does all things for the best although unknown to us. On January 12, 1932 at the age of 72 she passed quietly away. She left her children and her grandchildren (35) a burning testimony of the truthfulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the memory of a life well spent. Surely we her children should cherish such a heritage.

Written by her daughter, Abby Johnson Kendrick Robinson Gooch